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U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

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ROBERT L. SIMMONS, STAFF DIRECTOR

April 7, 2006

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It has been almost four months since the Iraqi people went to the polls to elect a national government. That was a wonderful day of great promise. Unfortunately, that promise has not yet been realized. The Iraqis have been unable to coalesce around a central government and the sectarian violence has escalated to the point where it has eclipsed the insurgency in terms of the threat it poses to the Iraqi people and the future of their state.

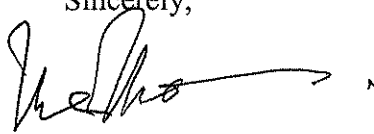
I know you share the view that the formation of a government is essential to Iraq's political development. There must be a functioning Iraqi government in Baghdad and the Iraqi people must become convinced it exists to serve them. Without that, there is great danger that the sectarian violence will continue to escalate until one side rises to power by exhausting or annihilating its rivals. The hope that the Iraqi people will live in freedom under a representational government that maximizes the entire nation's potential, while protecting the rights of minorities, risks being extinguished for at least another generation or more.

Iraq's political development is critical, as well, to our ability to our own plans for transitioning responsibility for security from American to Iraqi forces. My own view has always been that we should begin redeploying American forces based on a ratio of trained Iraqi forces able to take over their missions. Without a unified government and functioning, capable ministries, it is not clear to me what useful purpose American forces will continue to serve. The political coherence of the Iraqi nation is the foundation without which no other effort can usefully stand.

Therefore, I was pleased to see that Secretary Rice and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw were in Baghdad last week to stress the importance of forming a government as quickly as possible. Iraqi leaders must understand that time is of the essence and I believe they will be most likely to succeed with coordinated and consistent outside pressure and support.

I was struck, however, by the absence of similar efforts on the parts of our friends, allies, and other states. A satisfactory solution in Iraq is not just in Iraqi and American interests. It is of global significance. The entire world will benefit when that conflict is resolved and the region is at peace. To that end, then, I recommend that we renew our diplomatic efforts, particularly among our European allies and the nations of the Persian Gulf and Middle East region, and ask them to join us in communicating to the Iraqis just how pressing the need to settle on a national government is. Perhaps the combined effect of this broad and unified effort will be the catalyst needed to move the Iraqis forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ike Skelton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ike Skelton
Ranking Democrat